



# STATE ETHICS COMMISSION BULLETIN

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## Commission Focuses on Effectiveness and Efficiency

Each year, the State Ethics Commission deals with thousands of public employees and others with interests in matters involving ethics and the conflict of interest and financial disclosure laws – approximately 4,000 individuals seek advice from the Commission each year and about 5,000 file statements of financial interests. Over 3,000 attend educational programs about the conflict of interest law and thousands more visit the website for information. Finally, the Commission receives between 900 and 1,000 complaints each year alleging violations of the law. On average, 1,000 individuals interact with the Ethics Commission each month.

With a staff of 22 that serves under five Commissioners who meet monthly, the Commission faces the challenge of ensuring that each of the individuals who come into contact with the Commission receives effective and efficient services.

The Legislature and the Governor recognized this challenge and last year appropriated an additional \$150,000 to

the Commission's budget to allow the Commission to hire an additional attorney, an intake investigator and a part-time receptionist.

The Commission has adopted a number of practices to enhance the services the Commission provides. In the legal division, which provides free, confidential and binding advice about the application of the conflict of interest law to situations public officials may be facing, individuals requesting opinions are encouraged to accept verbal advice, for which the Commission maintains a confidential log, rather than seek written opinions.

The financial disclosure division has, for the past four years, offered online filing of statements of financial interests (SFIs). About 75% of those who file now do so electronically. One of the chief benefits of filing online for public officials who are required to file SFIs is that the program each year repopulates the questions with the answers from the previous year. Filers whose financial situation has not

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## Ethics Primer: Financial Interests in Contracts for State Employees

*Periodically, the Bulletin will discuss a particular area of the conflict of interest law. The information provided is educational in nature and should not be considered legal advice. Persons with questions about a specific situation should contact the Ethics Commission for free confidential legal advice.*

Section 7 of G.L. c. 268A, the conflict of interest law, generally prohibits a state employee (paid or unpaid, appointed or elected, full-

time or part-time) from having a financial interest, directly or indirectly, in a contract made by the state or a state agency. There are, however, several exceptions and exemptions from this prohibition.

All state employees must comply with an exception or exemption to § 7 in order to lawfully have a financial interest in a state contract.

Any current state employee who

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## Elected Officials and Candidates Face May 30 Deadline for SFI Filing

The filing deadline for state and county elected officials, as well as candidate for those positions, to file annual statements of financial interests (SFIs) for calendar year 2005 is Tuesday, May 30, 2006. Appointed state and county officials in policy-making positions were required to file on May 1, 2006.

The Commission receives and reviews thousands of financial disclosure forms annually. They are public records.

Commission staff members are available daily between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. to provide walk-in or telephone assistance to filers who wish to file electronically.

Each year, nearly 100% of filers meet the deadlines. A small percentage of individuals fail to file in a timely manner. Failure to file may result in civil penalties of up to \$2,000. In addition, an official who is required to file but who has not done so may not continue to perform his or her duties or receive compensation.

Filers may do so electronically at [www.eth.state.ma.us](http://www.eth.state.ma.us).

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From the Executive Director

*"Using Public Resources Appropriately"*

A recent *Boston Globe* front-page headline and story reported that the Massachusetts State Ethics Commission has "dramatically expanded" restrictions on a public officials' ability to discuss politics and political questions in the State House. Unfortunately, the article's conclusions are inaccurate.

The Commission's Political Activity advisory is simply an update. It neither changes the rules nor further restricts political activity. Unexpectedly, the update has generated a fair amount of discussion about the nature of politics, government and ethics. While the Ethics Commission welcomes and encourages such discussion, it is important to set the record straight. The advisory restricts the use of public resources for political purposes. It does not restrict political speech.

As a result of the *Globe's* article, some columnists and others have suggested that the advisory prohibits a legislator from answering a reporter's casual question about his candidacy, a Democratic legislator from criticizing the Governor or the Governor from criticizing a Democratic initiative if these actions occur in the State House. Based on the *Globe's* article some might ask if the advisory would prohibit a legislative aide from researching a legislative matter that is related to a political party's platform. The answer to each of

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## Commission Members Spring, 2006

E. George Daher, Chair  
J. Owen Todd, Vice-Chair  
Tracey Maclin  
Matthew N. Kane  
Jeanne M. Kempthorne

Carol Carson  
Editor

## Educational Outreach Continues with New and Updated Educational Materials, Online Training Program

The State Ethics Commission provides several types of educational materials, all of which are available online. The Commission has been reviewing and updating its educational materials as well as adding new ones.

Primers are discussions for the lay person of a particular section of the conflict of interest law. They originally appeared in the Commission's *Bulletin*. In addition to the Primer on page one of this *Bulletin*, "Financial Interests in Contracts for State Employees," recent primers for state employees include, "[Self-Dealing and Financial Interests](#)," "[Appearing before State Agencies and Boards](#)," and "[Former State Employees](#)."

Advisories interpret various provisions of the conflict of interest law in more detail. They often respond to issues that may arise in the context of a particular advisory opinion or enforcement action but which have the potential for broad application. Recently added advisories include:

- [Advisory 05-4: Voting on Matters Involving Competitors](#)
- [Advisory 05-5: Rule of Necessity](#)
- [Advisory 06-1: Consultants are Public Employees](#)

In addition to new advisories, the Commission periodically updates its advisories as needed. The most re-

cently updated advisory is Advisory 84-01: Political Activity. This update did not change the rules but addresses some new issues. For example, when the Advisory was first written in 1984, the use of databases and websites for political campaign purposes did not exist. The Advisory now addresses the prohibition against using public resources for such activities. It also offers some additional helpful guidance to help public officials comply with the law. It is particularly timely, given the upcoming elections.

Finally, summaries of the conflict of interest law are created to provide guidance to certain categories of public officials. "[Summary 1: Selectmen](#)" was recently updated. Expect other summaries to be updated throughout the year.

It is important to keep in mind that educational materials are general in nature and are not exhaustive reviews of the conflict law. For specific questions, public officials and employees should contact their agency or municipal counsel or the Legal Division of the State Ethics Commission at (617) 371-9500.

This summer, the Commission hopes to introduce an online training program that will provide state agencies with a tool to educate their employees about the restrictions the conflict of interest law places on them.

## Staff Notes

**Brett Wingard**, a senior investigator in the Commission's Enforcement Division, is leaving the Commission to work as a U.S. probation officer based in Boston. **Brian McWilliams**, who previously worked as an investigative journalist and is the author of *Spam Kings: The Real Story behind the High-Rolling Hucksters Pushing Porn, Pills, and %\*#@) # Enlargements*, is joining the Commission to replace Mr. Wingard.

Two Northeastern University students, **Meaghan Queally** of Milton, Massachusetts and **Steven Stites** of Arlington, Texas are serving as interns in the Commission's Enforcement Division. Queally, a criminal justice major, is a junior; Stites, also a criminal justice major, is a senior.

**Judith Ubando**, a second year law student at New England School of Law is working as an intern with the Commission's Legal Division as part of an administrative law clinic. She is a native of Santa Clara, California and earned a B.A. in history from the University of California at Berkeley.

## Recent Enforcement Matters

*The Ethics Commission investigates numerous cases alleging violations of the conflict of interest and financial disclosure laws each year. While the Commission resolves most matters confidentially, it resolves certain cases publicly.*

*A disposition agreement is a voluntary written agreement entered into between the subject and the Commission in which the subject admits violating the law and agrees to pay a civil penalty. Disposition agreements are matters of public record once a case is concluded.*

*The Commission does not comment on any matter under investigation, nor does the office confirm or deny that it has received a specific complaint. The identity of any complainant is kept confidential.*

*Full texts of Disposition Agreements can be found on the Commission's website, [www.mass.gov/ethics](http://www.mass.gov/ethics).*

**In the Matter of Michael Bencal** - Salem City Councilor Michael Bencal paid a civil penalty of \$2,000 for violating section 23(b)(2) the state's conflict of interest law by improperly soliciting campaign contributions for the mayoral campaign of Salem City Councilor Kevin Harvey. According to the Disposition Agreement, Bencal contacted Salem Parking Director James Hacker in March 2004. Bencal told Hacker that Harvey, if he became mayor, would reappoint Hacker as parking director if Hacker raised \$4,000 for Harvey's mayoral campaign. In Salem, the mayor appoints the parking director subject to City Council approval. After Hacker said he was unable to meet with Bencal and Harvey the following weekend, Bencal said he would arrange a meeting and call Hacker back. Harvey did not win the election. By soliciting \$4,000 in contributions for Harvey's mayoral campaign from Hacker where Bencal had the ability to impact Hacker's position as parking director then and in the future, Bencal used his city councilor position to get an unwarranted privilege, i.e., soliciting contributions in exchange for favorable treatment for Hacker concerning his parking director position.

**In the Matter of Angelo R. Buonopane** - The Commission fined former Massachusetts Labor Director Angelo R. Buonopane a total of \$28,000 for violating the section 23(b)(2) of the state's conflict of interest law by taking approximately \$18,000 in unauthorized vacation/personal time compensation.

Buonopane paid a \$10,000 civil penalty and \$18,000 as a civil forfeiture, the value of the unearned vacation/personal time compensation he received. According to the Disposition Agreement, Buonopane was entitled to four weeks vacation and three personal days annually. During his tenure as Labor Director, he submitted timesheets which resulted in his receiving approximately eight additional weeks of leave time in excess of what was properly available to him. Buonopane resigned from his position in April 2005 when allegations about his excessive leave time became public. By taking \$18,000 in compensation for vacation and personal time, Buonopane used his position to get an unwarranted privilege.

**In the Matter of Douglas C. Deschenes** - The Commission issued a Disposition Agreement in which Westford Affordable Housing Committee member Douglas C. Deschenes admitted violating the state's conflict of interest law and agreed to pay a civil penalty of \$5,000. Deschenes also agreed to forfeit \$3,862, the compensation he had received for work done in relation to matters involving the AHC. According to the Disposition Agreement, Deschenes, an attorney, violated G.L. c. 268A, § 17(a) and (c) by representing clients for compensation on 11 different plans before the AHC. Deschenes did not participate as an AHC member in matters involving

his clients.

**In the Matter of Kelly Giampa** - Former Springfield Parking Authority Operations and Facilities Manager Kelly Giampa paid a civil penalty of \$3,000 for soliciting bribes for herself and a friend in early September 2003 from a contractor seeking work from the Authority, a violation of G.L. c. 268A, § 2. According to a Disposition Agreement, Edward Rossi, whose wife worked at the Authority, expressed interest in bidding on a contract to remove and replace a retaining wall at an Authority parking lot. After Executive Director Clement Chelli questioned whether the contract could be awarded to the spouse of an Authority employee, Giampa told Rossi that she would make sure Rossi got the contract if Rossi gave her \$1,000. Giampa also proposed that Rossi give her friend \$1,000 in return for her friend's name being used on the contract instead of Rossi's. Rossi declined Giampa's suggestion and subsequently submitted a bid. When the Authority learned that Giampa had allegedly solicited money from Rossi in relation to his bid, the Authority canceled the bids and ordered an investigation. Giampa was suspended, then resigned, from her position.

**In the Matter of Therese A. Hamel** - The Commission fined former Chicopee Assistant Treasurer Therese A. Hamel \$5,000 for violating section

### SECTION BY SECTION THE CONFLICT OF INTEREST LAW, G. L. c. 268A

- Section 2 prohibits a public employee from corruptly soliciting or seeking anything of value for herself or any other person in return for being influenced in her performance of any official act.
- Section 17(a) of the conflict law prohibits a municipal employee from receiving compensation from anyone other than the town in relation to particular matters in which the town has an interest.
- Section 17(c) prohibits a municipal employee from acting as an attorney for anyone other than the town in connection with a particular matter in which the town is a party or has a direct and substantial interest.
- Section 19 prohibits a municipal employee from officially participating in matters in which he has a financial interest.
- Section 20 prohibits a municipal official from having a financial interest in a contract made by a municipal agency of the same city or town.
- Section 23(b)(2) prohibits a public employee from using or attempting to use his position to secure for himself or others an unwarranted privilege of substantial value not properly available to similarly situated individuals.



23(b)(2) of the state's conflict of interest law by repeatedly allowing herself, family, friends and co-workers to cash checks at the Treasurer's Office without her office immediately depositing them and to take cash from the Treasurer's Office, leaving IOU's. According to the Disposition Agreement, Hamel allowed friends and family to cash personal checks then held the checks for significant periods of time without depositing them for payment. She also allowed herself, friends, co-workers and family to take cash of up to \$1,000. After the State Police investigated Hamel's conduct, she repaid the City \$4,400 for monies she and others had borrowed. In March 2005, an independent auditor's report criticized the actions but found no cash shortages. Hamel resigned under pressure and repaid the City \$110 in interest on the \$4,400 that had been improperly borrowed. By using the Treasurer's Office as a private bank for herself, family, friends, and co-workers, Hamel obtained for herself and others the unwarranted privilege of personal banking services.

[In the Matter of Andrew Hamilton](#) - The Commission fined former Wendell Board of Health member Andrew Hamilton \$2,000 for violating the state's conflict of interest law, M.G.L. c. 268A, by using his position to sell a water filtration system valued at \$1,112, to a resident after water from her new well failed to meet certain requirements. According to the Disposition Agreement, Hamilton as a BOH member met with Reverend Adele Smith-Penniman, who was converting a weekend home to a year-round dwelling, and informed her that her well water's iron and manganese levels, which were tested by an independent laboratory, were too high. Hamilton then told Smith-Penniman that he was going to "change hats" and speak to her in his private capacity. He then sold her a water filtration system. Smith-Penniman felt pressure to purchase the system because Hamilton was on the BOH and because the BOH signs off on building permits. After Smith-Penniman purchased the water filtration system, she did not install it. Usage of the well worked out the contaminants. By soliciting someone who was subject to a stop work order by the BOH, and by making his solicitation in the course of an official discussion where he addressed the

work order issue, Hamilton used his BOH position to influence Smith-Penniman to purchase a water filtration system. As part of the agreement, Hamilton agreed to return \$1,112 to Smith-Penniman in exchange for return of the water filtration unit.

[In the Matter of John R. Llewellyn](#) -

The Commission issued a Disposition Agreement in which former Rockland selectman John R. Llewellyn admitted violating the state's conflict of interest law and agreed to resign his position as deputy chief in the Rockland Police Department. Llewellyn also paid a civil penalty of \$2,000. According to the Disposition Agreement Llewellyn served as a Rockland police officer since 1988 and was promoted to patrol sergeant in 1997. In 1999, he was elected to the board of selectmen. An exemption to section 20 of the conflict of interest law allowed Llewellyn to continue to hold the position of police sergeant after his election in 1999 to the board of selectmen. The exemption, however, prohibits a municipal employee who is elected to the board of selectmen from being eligible for appointment to a new position while he serves on the board or for six months thereafter. In September 2004, Llewellyn received advice from the Commission that he could not accept a promotion to a new position, such as deputy chief, while continuing to serve as a selectman or for six months thereafter. In December 2004, the police chief offered Llewellyn the deputy chief position. Llewellyn accepted the job as of January 2005 and sought to resign from the board of selectmen. When he learned of the costs involved for holding a special election to fill a selectman vacancy, Llewellyn decided to stay on the Board until April 2005, when the next election was scheduled to occur.

[In the Matter of David M. Lunny](#) -

Mendon-Upton Regional School District employee David M. Lunny paid a civil penalty of \$2,500 for violating the state's conflict of interest law, M.G.L. c. 268A, by improperly soliciting services from employees of Mount Vernon Group, a private architectural firm, which served as the architect for the construction of the Memorial Elementary School in Upton. Lunny paid a \$2,000 civil penalty and a \$500 civil forfeiture, reflecting the value of the drafting services he received. According to the Disposition Agreement, Lunny was hired by the school district in

September 2002 as an owner's representative of the school project, responsible for reporting back to the school building committee on the progress of the project, including assessing how the architect was performing its responsibilities. While at the job site, Lunny asked Greg McIntosh, a principal of Mount Vernon Group, to review documents for a proposed garage/office Lunny planned to build at his house and to produce computer-aided drawings of the proposed structure. McIntosh worked occasionally on Lunny's project until March 2003 when he told Lunny he had no more time to spend on it. Mount Vernon Group employee Tim Sampson, the project manager, agreed to take over the project as a favor to McIntosh but told Lunny he expected to be paid for his work. In April 2003, Sampson gave Lunny the work he had produced. Lunny never paid Sampson or McIntosh for the work they had done, which they estimated was worth \$500.

[In the Matter of Robert C. Tinkham](#) -

The Commission approved a Disposition Agreement in which Carver Board of Health Agent Robert C. Tinkham, Jr. admitted to violating section 19 of the state's conflict of interest law by overseeing testing of, inspecting and approving installation of new septic systems at a campground owned by his parents. Tinkham paid a civil penalty of \$3,000. According to the Disposition Agreement, in 2002, Pinewood Way Camping Area, a South Carver campground owned and operated by Tinkham's parents and as to which Tinkham serves as a corporate director, was required to upgrade its septic systems in accordance with Title 5 of the state environmental code. In November 2002, Tinkham as health agent witnessed five soil percolation tests for five new septic systems. In April 2003, Tinkham, acting on behalf of the BOH, inspected the installed systems and authorized their completion. In addition, Tinkham submitted five sewerage system inspection reports to the BOH and signed five certificates of compliance. The BOH had instructed Tinkham in 1995 that any inspections he performed at the campground would be done with a BOH member present. A BOH member was not present during Tinkham's actions inspecting and approving installation of the septic systems.

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wants to add another state position that is **appointed and compensated** must qualify for an exception or exemption. Similarly, if the state employee wishes to have a financial interest in a state contract that does not involve another state position, she must also qualify for an exception or exemption.

Second, if a **prospective** state employee already has a financial interest in a contract with the state, he must qualify for an exception or exemption when he begins to serve as a state employee.

Third, if a current **appointed and compensated** state employee wants to add an **unpaid** state position or an **elected** state position (whether paid or unpaid), she will need to qualify for an exception or exemption. However, unlike the first two types of state employees described above, she needs to qualify for an exception or exemption that will allow her to *continue* to be paid in her current state position while also serving in her appointed/unpaid or elected position.

#### Exceptions

Section 7 does not apply if the state employee's financial interest is the ownership of less than one percent of the stock of a corporation. It also does not apply to a state employee who in good faith and within 30 days after he learns of an actual or prospective violation of the section makes a full disclosure of his financial interest to the contracting agency and terminates or disposes of his interest.

Section 7 does not apply to a state employee who provides services or furnishes goods to a recipient of public assistance, provided that such services or such supplies, goods and materials are provided in accordance with a schedule of charges promulgated by the department of transitional assistance or the division of health care policy and finance and provided, further, that such recipient has the right under law to choose and in fact does choose the person or firm that will provide such services or furnish such supplies, goods and materials.

The section does not prohibit a state employee from teaching or performing other related duties on a part-time basis

in an educational institution of the Commonwealth, provided he does not participate in or have official responsibility for the financial management of the institution.

A MassPort employee who is eligible for any residential sound insulation program administered by MassPort is not prohibited from participating in the program provided she has no responsibility for the administration of the program.

#### Exemptions

A state employee, other than a member of the general court may have a financial interest in a contract with the state if:

- the state employee is not employed by and does not participate in or have responsibility for the activities of the contracting agency or an agency which regulates the activities of that agency;
- the contract is made after public notice or competitive bidding; and
- the state employee files with the ethics commission a disclosure of his and/or his family's interest.

In addition, if the contract is for personal services, additional requirements must be met; a state employee seeking a contract for personal services should seek advice from the Ethics Commission

A member of the general court may have a financial interest in a contract with an agency other than the general court if:

- the member's direct and indirect interests and those of his immediate family in the corporation or other commercial entity with which the contract is made do not in the aggregate amount to ten percent of the total interests; and
- the contract is made after public notice or competitive bidding; and
- the member files with the ethics commission a disclosure of his and/or his family's interest.

Finally, a state employee is not prohibited from being employed part-time at any 24-hour facility of the state, provided that he does not participate in or have responsibility for the financial management of the facility. Such facilities include mental health, public health and correctional facilities that operate on an uninterrupted and continuous basis. The state employee may not work more than four hours at the facility on any day in which he is otherwise compensated by the Commonwealth and faces restrictions on the amount of compensation he can earn and the head of the facility must file a

written certification that there is a critical need for the services of the employee.

#### Special State Employees

The Legislature created 'special state employee' status to allow the state to engage individuals who, otherwise, might not be able to serve because of their private activities or because they already are state, or special state, employees in another capacity.

A special state employee is a state employee who is:

- serving in a position that is not compensated, or
- not elected and occupies a position which permits personal or private employment during normal working hours, provided that disclosure of such classification or permission is filed in writing with the state ethics commission prior to the commencement of any personal or private employment, or does not earn compensation for more than eight hundred hours during the preceding three hundred and sixty-five days.

For this purpose compensation by the day shall be considered as equivalent to compensation for seven hours per day. A special state employee shall be in such a status on days for which he is not compensated as well as on days on which he earns compensation.

Special state employee status *narrows, but does not eliminate*, the scope of the restrictions on a special state employee's conduct.

#### Additional Exemptions for Special State Employees

A special state employee may have a financial interest in a state contract if she "does not participate in or have official responsibility for any of the activities of the contracting agency" **and** she files with the State Ethics Commission a disclosure of her interest and her immediate family's interest.

A special state employee who either participates in or has official responsibility for any of the activities of the contracting agency must not only file the same disclosure as described in §20(c) but also obtain the approval of the governor for an exemption.

It's complicated! You can contact the Ethics Commission at 617-371-9500 for specific advice.

## Litigation Update

### Jane Doe v. State Ethics Commission

*The Executive Director, and by delegation, the Commission's Legal Division attorneys, have special assistant attorney general status. This status permits Legal Division attorneys to represent the Commission in court proceedings, under the oversight of the Office of the Attorney General. The Commission has recently been involved in one litigation matter.*

Jane Doe appealed the Superior Court's decision compelling her to testify in a deposition in relation to a matter under investigation by the Commission's Enforcement Division.

This matter is pending in the Appeals Court. Materials in this matter are impounded.

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*these questions is "No."*

*So what did the advisory say? As it has on many occasions, the Commission reiterated a rule that elected officials and the public understand quite well: public resources may not be used "in support of or in opposition to a federal, state or local candidate or a political party or a state or local ballot question." Whether the resource is office supplies and equipment, such as copy machines, faxes or computers, or staff time, public resources are to be used for the purposes for which taxpayer dollars have been appropriated.*

*This position is not new. The Commonwealth's highest court articulated this position in connection with a local ballot question as far back as 1978. It has been articulated by the Commission since 1984, when this Political Activity advisory was first issued.*

*The Commission recognizes that politics and policy are often inseparable, particularly for elected officials, and that all public officials, elected and appointed, operate to a greater or lesser extent*

*within a political framework. The Commission's recent advisory continues to recognize that fact. Nothing in the advisory prohibits a legislator from answering questions from a reporter about an upcoming campaign fundraising event or a major policy issue. Indeed, elected officials are generally free to discuss any political topic. Nor does the advisory prevent the same legislator's aide from researching or analyzing the policy issue. But, the aide may not spend his day in the State House, on the public payroll, writing a campaign speech for the campaign event or making calls to supporters encouraging them to attend. In short, the use of public resources for political purposes is prohibited, not political discussion.*

*The Commission realizes that determining whether an activity is predominantly political, that is, designed to support or oppose a candidate, party or ballot question, will depend on the facts of each case. Like any advisory, this one is meant to provide general guidance. It is also intended to remind public officials, particularly*

## New Advisory Opinion Issued

*reimbursement, for not more than 500 hours during a calendar year. Compensation for more than 500 hours will require the creation of an additional exemption in § 7. Special state employees not employed by DSS may use the § 7(d) exemption. The Commission is concerned about the impact that the application of the conflict of interest law would have on these children and their foster/adoptive parents or guardians in these circumstances. Therefore, in accordance with its power to prescribe and publish regulations providing for reasonable exemptions from the conflict of interest law, the Commission intends to issue a regulation that will allow DSS employees for whom no statutory exemption applies, to serve as foster/pre-adoptive parents, adoptive parents and guardians and to receive the applicable payments for such service.*

*as the campaign season begins, that public officials have a responsibility to ensure that public funds – taxpayer dollars – are spent on the public's business.*

*The Commission's Advisory on Political Activity can be found at [www.mass.gov/ethics/adv8401.htm](http://www.mass.gov/ethics/adv8401.htm).*

*Peter Sturges*

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*changed can easily review and update their filing for the current year.*

*The communications and public education division, which provides free educational seminars, publishes educational materials and manages the website, is planning to develop an online training program for state employees, and ultimately all public employees, that will allow state agencies to efficiently train their employees about the restrictions of the conflict of interest law.*

*Finally, the enforcement division of the Commission has reviewed its practices and streamlined them to more efficiently investigate and resolve complaints.*